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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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22.09.2019

Hong Kong: Make colonialism great again

Posted to lowwagecapitalism.com on Sept. 11, 2019.

Sept. 10 — It is a thoroughly reactionary development when demonstrators carrying U.S. flags march through a city asking the most hated imperialist figure, Donald Trump, to come to their aid. But that is what is happening in Hong Kong.

Despite all the claims in the capitalist press about the demonstrators being advocates of “democracy” and “freedom,” they have embraced a political figure who has locked immigrant children in cages after separating them from their families.

They have called for aid from a president who has called for Muslims to be banned from the U.S. They have embraced a vile racist who has called African nations and Haiti “shithole” countries. Trump has called Mexicans rapists and criminals. What can be the political mentality of demonstrators who would ask for help from a racist bigot in the name of “democracy”?

It is the mentality of capitalist greed.

Donald Trump is trying to low-key the demonstrations because he wants to de-escalate a trade war with the People’s Republic of China. He is afraid that the trade war will trigger an economic downturn in the U.S. And an economic downturn will hurt his chances of reelection in 2020.

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But Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, the China hawks in Trump's administration and the CIA did not get the memo. And if they did, Trump is playing soft cop in this scenario.

Washington and the mainstream media outlets are going all out to foment a full-scale pro-imperialist rebellion, basically demanding independence for Hong Kong. They hope to prolong the demonstrations in order to embarrass the PRC on the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution on Oct. 1. But the strategic goal of the Trump administration is to back the PRC into a corner and provoke it to intervene in Hong Kong.

Washington and the Pentagon would like to create a small-scale version of the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989.

Washington hopes that this will give the entire worldwide propaganda apparatus of the imperialists a green light to open up a major anti-Chinese campaign and set the stage for hostilities or even war. Given the divisions in the imperialist camp and the growing weight of China as an economic power, however, it remains to be seen whether these plans can materialize.

Hong Kong 'the new Berlin'

Joshua Wong, one of the leaders of the demonstrations in the 2014 Hong Kong "umbrella" movement and one of the main leaders in the present struggle spoke in Berlin on Sept. 9 saying: "If we are in a new Cold War, Hong Kong is the new Berlin." He continued, "We urge the free world to stand together with us in resisting the Chinese autocratic regime," in a clear signal to the capitalist world. (Reuters, Sept. 9)

By recalling the image of Berlin and the wall that divided the East and West, Wong evoked the vision of the beginning of the destruction of the socialist camp in Eastern Europe and the ultimate demise of the USSR. Wang's clear goal is the destruction of socialist China.

The place of Hong Kong in modern China

With the victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949, the People's Liberation Army drove the imperialist puppet Nationalist army off the mainland and onto the island of Taiwan. From a military point of view, the PLA was supreme on mainland China.

Mao Zedong could have ordered the PLA to take Hong Kong, and it would not have taken much more than a day. But he did not do that. Why? Because China was a vast and impoverished country. Before the revolution, China was known as the land of hunger. Famines took the lives of hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of people because of warlord rule and the lack of transportation.

The revolution solved that problem with massive land redistribution.

But China was in dire need of agricultural and industrial infrastructure. Following the revolution, the U.S. imposed a blockade on technology and industrial equipment. The USSR gave assistance. But China still needed financial channels to the outside world, and Hong Kong was a crucial financial center.

‘One country, two systems’

Fast forward to 1982. Mao had died in 1976, and the leftist forces associated with the Cultural Revolution were defeated. Deng Xiaoping entered into negotiations with the British imperialists over Hong Kong. The PRC made clear that they regarded Hong Kong as part of China. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried to hold out for the continuation of three oppressive treaties signed under military threats from Britain in 1842, 1860 and 1898. It was those treaties, known to the Chinese as the “unequal treaty,” which formalized the British colonization of Hong Kong.

In the negotiations, the British imperialists wanted to retain administrative control of the territory. Deng told the British that the PRC regarded Hong Kong as part of China and threatened to invade to take back its territory. London was forced to abandon its attempts to retain the unequal treaties and the administration of Hong Kong.

However, with Mao gone, the “reformers” under Deng were in charge. The PRC adopted the “one country, two systems” doctrine. An agreement was signed and went into effect in 1997. The doctrine said that Hong Kong would retain its capitalist system until 2047. A legislature and a governing council were set up. The PRC would have input into the legislature, retain the right to govern Hong Kong foreign policy and the right to interpret laws. Hong Kong was designated by China as a special administrative region.

In a way, the arrangement with Hong Kong mirrored what the new Chinese leadership was trying to establish under the name “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” A mix of socialism and capitalism. Only in China there was a mass Chinese Communist Party which could hold the capitalists in check, as well as strategic state-owned enterprises. In Hong Kong, the largest imperialist banks, accounting firms, brokerage companies and law firms were left to dominate the economics of the territory. Always in fear of the PRC and socialism, they gradually tried to dominate the politics of Hong Kong as well.

The latest counterrevolutionary, pro-colonialist demonstrations, complete with U.S. flags, singing the U.S. national anthem and appeals to Trump for assistance, represent a surge forward by the anti-PRC capitalist class to take over the political system in Hong Kong.

It is a law of capitalism that capital accumulates and gets stronger over time. Over the years, the Hong Kong capitalists, with the aid of imperialism, have never abandoned the attempt to get out from under the shadow of the PRC. In a small territory like Hong Kong, this can only be done with the aid and backing of a major power like the U.S.

Hong Kong and world finance capital

The PRC faces significant risks in Hong Kong. The territory plays a crucial role in the economic development of China. Hundreds of billions of dollars flow in and out of mainland China through Hong Kong. (“Why China Still Needs Hong Kong,” Peterson International Institute for Economics, July 15)

“No less than 64 percent of the mainland’s inward foreign direct investment and 65 percent of its outward foreign direct investment was booked in Hong Kong. Chinese banks, which are now worth US\$1.2 trillion, hold overseas assets concentrated in Hong Kong.” (“Hong Kong is irreplaceable for China,” South China Morning Post, Aug. 30)

The imperialists know this and are gambling that they can force concessions from China by economic extortion. This is the danger of the “one country, two systems” regime in Hong Kong.

Lost in all the enthusiasm of the capitalist press for the reactionaries is the plight of the working class.

In Hong Kong, houses cost 20.9 times the average yearly household income. Compare that with 9.4 times in Los Angeles and 9.1 times in San Francisco — cities infamous for their housing crises — and the extent of the problem becomes apparent.

“‘Hong Kong only builds for the rich. They need to care for real people,’ says Chan To, 30, a skinny man with flecks of gray in his hair who has been homeless since he lost his job as a chef last summer. ... Chan sought refuge in McDonald’s, sleeping in various outlets every night for the last four months, he says.” (Huffington Post, Nov. 20, 2018)

“McRefugees” is a Hong Kong term for people living in booths at fast food places. Homelessness and being rent-poor is endemic in Hong Kong. The minimum wage is US\$4 an hour in a city that has been rated as the most expensive in the world. The demonstrators who carry U.S. flags have no demands to improve the lot of the impoverished Hong Kong working class.

‘Lady Liberty’ at Tiananmen Square

Such flagrant appeals to colonialism have not been seen since the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China in 1989. At that time, the vast assembly of counterrevolutionary student protesters, many of them schooled in the U.S., displayed a replica of the Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Square in an open appeal for support from U.S. imperialism. Mikhail Gorbachev, who opened the door to counterrevolution in the USSR, went to the demonstrations to show his solidarity. The “reformist” capitalist-road Chinese premier at the time, Zao Zhiyang, was put under house arrest for encouraging a full-scale counterrevolution aimed at overthrowing the socialist system.

Parading through Hong Kong with U.S. flags in 2019 is the equivalent of displaying the statue of “Lady Liberty” in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Playing with capitalism is like playing with fire as far as socialists are concerned. The attacks on Chinese technology, the U.S. naval threats in the South China Sea, the brutal trade war initiated by Trump and the witch-hunt by the FBI against Chinese scientists in the U.S. are all part of the growing antagonism between Chinese socialism and U.S. imperialism.

One can hope the Chinese leadership will draw the necessary lessons from the developments in Hong Kong and the U.S. anti-China offensive. A hard assessment of U.S. imperialism and the voracious appetite of the exploiting class may be in order.

Following the great anti-colonial wave in Africa, India and the Middle East after World War II, the British Union Jack had to be pulled down. In fact, the surrender of Hong Kong was said to be the last gasp of the British world empire. The British, the U.S. and other imperialists had to resort to neocolonialism, economic penetration and the installation of puppet regimes to maintain their world domination.

Hoisting the U.S. flag in Hong Kong is a signal that these demonstrators want to return to the open colonialism of old. Trump and company want to make colonialism great again.

21.09.2019